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Chairman: Mr. Hachami ..... (Tunisia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Organization of work (A/C.3/53/10)

1. **The Chairman** drew the attention of the members of the Committee to a letter dated 26 October 1998 from the Chairman of the Fifth Committee (A/C.3/53/10), in which the Chairman of the Fifth Committee requested the Third Committee's views on proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for 1998–2001 for three programmes related to the Third Committee.

Agenda item 110: Human rights questions

(d) Comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (A/53/372)

2. **Ms. Robinson** (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights), introducing the report on follow-up to the World Conference on Human Rights (A/53/372), said that, in 1993, the World Conference on Human Rights had recommended that a five-year review of progress in the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action should be undertaken on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The review should, like other comprehensive debates carried out by United Nations organs and bodies, involve all actors; in particular, the participation of non-governmental organizations could enrich the debate.

3. The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which coincided with the five-year review of the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, demonstrated that, on the threshold of the twenty-first century, the international community was determined to ensure universal respect for human dignity. Those initiatives should not be viewed as isolated events, since they, like the Vienna Conference, were part of a wide-ranging process that sought to ensure the practical implementation and protection of human rights and assist people whose basic human rights had been violated. The five-year review had been carried out at the national and international levels with the participation of Governments and civil society, components of the United Nations system and other international organizations. It should enable the international community to identify shortcomings and accomplishments in the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and the best practices used to that end, and to adopt a course of action for the years to come.

4. It had been said that the creation of the United Nations High Commissioner's Office for Human Rights had been the most important achievement in the context of the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. The Vienna Conference had contributed decisively to a growing awareness of the inherent link between human rights and the basic problems of the world's societies. That was why the United Nations system, guided by the principles contained in paragraph 8 of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, had endeavoured to develop an integrated approach to the defence and protection of human rights, development and democracy. Similarly, at the national level, there was a growing awareness that sustainable development, as well as the prevention and peaceful settlement of most contemporary conflicts, depended on effective guarantees of human rights. That was also true of the phenomenon of globalization: if human rights were protected and all actors were involved, the positive impact of globalization could be enhanced and its negative consequences avoided.

5. The Vienna Conference had also given a new impetus to the efforts of Governments, national human rights institutions, regional organizations and non-governmental organizations, which were working to promote human rights. Non-governmental organizations had held pre-Conference regional meetings, organized a forum during the Conference and launched various initiatives, in particular in the area of women's rights. They had continued their efforts after the Conference, as demonstrated by the forums of non-governmental organizations that had recently been held in Ottawa and Geneva.

6. She stressed the importance of developing an integrated system-wide approach to human rights within the United Nations in keeping with the recommendations of the Vienna Conference and other conferences and summits, and expressed her appreciation for the efforts made by United Nations agencies and programmes in that regard.

7. In spite of the advances made over the past five years in the aforementioned areas of human rights, it was deplorable that, during the same period, two horrific genocides had occurred; there had been millions of victims of famine, malnutrition and epidemics, and millions of refugees and displaced persons; the practice of torture had continued; and poverty and underdevelopment had persisted. Those problems had been dealt with in reports of the various treaty bodies and special rapporteurs, in discussions held in the Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination Measures and Protection of Minorities, and by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. On the occasion of the

five-year review of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, it was time to take action, once and for all, to put the commitments made at the Conference into practice and to implement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

8. All necessary steps should be taken to strengthen the implementation of human rights at the national level. Governments must take effective action to enhance their national capacities, including national human rights institutions, and consider adopting national plans of action involving civil society. The existing United Nations technical assistance programmes were available to support that process. In addition, the system of international human rights instruments should be made more effective. The universal ratification of the six core human rights treaties, including the optional protocols thereto, within the next five years, would not only serve as a decisive step towards a shared international legal commitment to the implementation of all human rights but would also symbolize the international community's willingness to work in a true spirit of partnership to reach common goals. The adaptation of existing human rights machinery to current and future needs and the review of human rights mechanisms instituted by the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-fourth session would also be instrumental in advancing that process. In addition, a favourable environment for human rights and human development should be created by addressing major problems such as poverty, famine and malnutrition, inadequate housing and health care, illiteracy and chronic underdevelopment. Particular attention, furthermore, should be given to the eradication of racism, trafficking in women and children and mass human rights violations, including arbitrary executions, torture and involuntary disappearances. Increased emphasis should be placed on preventing human rights violations by addressing the economic, social, ethnic and other causes of conflicts which increasingly result in mass human rights violations, internal displacement and refugee flows.

9. In conclusion, it must be admitted that progress made in the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action remained too slow and unbalanced. For that reason, instead of accepting the status quo, contributions by all actors were needed: Governments, international organizations and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, the media and the corporate sector, developing a global alliance in order to implement fully the Declaration and Programme of Action.

10. **Mr. Valle** (Brazil) underscored the importance of the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993 and recalled the difficulties encountered in reaching a consensus on the text of the Declaration and Programme of Action. Those documents had universal significance, and the decisions taken at the Conference were extremely relevant, emphasizing the universal, indivisible and interdependent nature of human rights; the relationship between democracy, development and human rights; the legitimacy of international concern with human rights; and the need to combat extreme poverty and protect the environment.

11. Welcoming the establishment of the post of High Commissioner for Human Rights, his delegation had to admit that, five years after the Vienna Conference, the goals of the Declaration and Programme of Action were still far from realization and had yet to be duly reflected among the priorities of the Organization. In spite of the praiseworthy efforts undertaken within the system, the level of resources available for technical cooperation in the field of human rights was not commensurate with the needs for assistance on the part of developing countries. One of the key issues, therefore, to be addressed in the five-year review of the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action was to identify the factors impeding international cooperation in the promotion of democracy, development and respect for human rights.

12. Despite the budgetary constraints imposed by the current international financial crisis, Brazil had already pledged a contribution to the Trust Fund set up to support the activities of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and encouraged other countries to do the same. In implementing the Declaration and Programme of Action, Brazil supported the concept of mainstreaming human rights into the work of all United Nations departments, funds, programmes and specialized agencies as well as initiatives to enhance coordination in that field. His delegation welcomed, in that regard, the decisions taken by the Economic and Social Council, which would help enhance the efforts made throughout the system in the field of human rights.

13. In Brazil, the success of the Vienna Conference had been perceived as a victory of democratic values and human rights. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action had not only fostered greater interaction between the Government and society, but had also provided a main source of inspiration for the national programme of action on human rights. Brazil had been one of the first countries to follow the recommendation in paragraph 71 of the Programme of Action, demonstrating its commitment to the goals set by the World Conference. The Brazilian human rights programme reflected both the objectives of the Conference and the aspirations of the Brazilian people.

Numerous segments of civil society had participated actively in the consultations leading to its adoption.

14. Brazil, a democratic State, intended to respect its international commitments in the field of human rights and had submitted in a timely fashion information on the implementation, at the national level, of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action for the report of the High Commissioner. Although much remained to be done, noticeable progress had been achieved with regard to the situation of human rights in Brazil. In its efforts to achieve the goals set forth in the Declaration and Programme of Action, his Government would continue, with the support and contribution of civil society, to carry out a policy based on transparency, political will and international cooperation.

15. **Ms. King** (United States of America) said that the Vienna Declaration had reaffirmed that the promotion of all human rights was a legitimate concern of the international community. Within the framework of the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the United States had been visited during the past year by three Special Rapporteurs, and a highly regarded human rights organization had recently published a report concerning the United States, focusing in particular on some of the questions dealt with by the United States in the reports that it drew up each year with regard to specific countries. Since the promotion of human rights imposed an obligation on all States to demonstrate transparency and submit reports, the United States encouraged Member States to participate in that dialogue.

16. Universal ratification of the international human rights instruments would ensure that fundamental rights were respected and exercised, as stressed at the World Conference on Human Rights. In 1994, the United States had ratified both the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The reports it would submit under both of those instruments were being prepared. A White House office specifically responsible for reporting on the implementation of human rights instruments was about to be established. The President had urged rapid action by the Senate to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The United States had also been proactive in combating racism and racial discrimination. In 1997, the President had announced an initiative on race built around a five-point strategy generally aimed at eliminating racial discrimination in the critical areas of education, equal employment opportunity, housing, health care, crime and the administration of justice. An advisory board had been appointed to develop policies to close gaps in those areas. In November 1997, the President had convened the first White House conference on hate crimes, and the Attorney-General had begun a review of laws concerning such crimes. The Federal budget contained the largest increase in funding for the enforcement of civil rights laws in nearly two decades.

17. With regard to combating discrimination based on sex, the main Federal law in that area, Title IX, prohibited sex-based discrimination in federally funded education programmes or activities, had been strengthened. In 1994 Congress had passed the "Violence against Women Act", and in 1995 an advisory council composed of representatives of law enforcement agencies, the media, health and social services, and victim advocacy had been established. A 24-hour, toll-free national domestic violence hotline provided crisis assistance and shelter referrals.

18. In 1996, the President had established an inter-agency council on women to coordinate government programmes and initiatives to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. In 1998, that council had created a senior governmental working group to combat trafficking in women which worked with the European Union, the Group of 8, the United Nations and a number of bilateral partners. Training was provided to judges and immigration and law enforcement personnel to combat the trafficking of women and children. The working group was also funding the development of prototype legislation and guidelines on enforcement and victim protection. The Department of State and the United States Information Agency were organizing public awareness campaigns concerning that problem.

19. With regard to the protection of the rights of the child, the United States had passed a series of laws to combat child molestation and sexual abuse. One law which some might call a unilateral and extraterritorial measure, the "Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act", had also been adopted. Additional legislation required the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to develop a national database to track convicted sex offenders. The Justice Department had been requested to lead an inter-agency task force to implement the decisions taken by the 1996 Stockholm World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.

20. With regard to the rights of indigenous peoples, the Federal Government worked with the representatives of Indian tribes and Alaskan indigenous groups on many issues. Since 1996, an inter-agency working group had met quarterly to coordinate Federal and tribal initiatives on the health of children and youth, environmental protection and natural resources, education, entrepreneurship and job training. The Department of Justice worked with dozens of

tribes on alcohol rehabilitation, substance abuse and crime prevention programmes. The Federal strategy on environment and natural resources included projects in that area executed by indigenous groups. Each year, the Department of State engaged in consultations with indigenous leaders on issues affecting them, including the negotiation of Organization of American States (OAS) and United Nations draft declarations on the rights of indigenous peoples.

21. The Government had long worked with non-governmental organizations to protect religious minorities. In 1996, the Secretary of State had established an advisory committee to make recommendations on how to end religious conflicts and infringements on religious freedom and tolerance. A senior adviser had recently been appointed, and Congress had adopted the Religious Freedom Abroad Act.

22. As a follow-up to the Beijing Conference, the Department of State had hosted a forum for women with disabilities, at which the Secretary of State had announced that disability policy would be incorporated into United States foreign policy. As a result of a decision of Congress, individuals with disabilities were guaranteed an education in the least restrictive manner, and a national task force on the employment of adults with disabilities had been set up to endeavour to raise the percentage of disabled adults who were employed and ensuring that the Federal Government was a model employer of the disabled.

23. Finally, the United States remained a staunch advocate for the advancement of human rights, democracy and development, whether through diplomacy, bilateral and multilateral assistance, support for the international human rights machinery or support for global civil society. The promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout the world was the responsibility of all Member States. By combining their efforts with those of the international human rights bodies, the dream of universal implementation of human rights instruments could be realized.

24. **Mr. Strohal** (Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the associated country Cyprus and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) member of the European Economic Area (EEA), Iceland, said that the five-year review of the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action was a key moment not only for reflection upon the positive developments since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but also for examining the obstacles and challenges ahead in the implementation of international human rights standards at the national level. The international community as a whole should review its commitment to the effective promotion and protection of all human rights and build upon the results of the Vienna Conference. The Declaration and Programme of Action, which reaffirmed the universality of human rights and recognized that the promotion and protection of all human rights was a legitimate concern of the international community, constituted a comprehensive programme based on the principle of the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights.

25. The European Union welcomed the increased attention paid to the promotion of economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development. Their enjoyment facilitated the enjoyment of civil and political rights. Nevertheless, Governments could not invoke the lack of development to justify curtailment of human rights. Since it had proved relatively difficult to measure progress in implementing economic and social rights, the elaboration of indicators would prove useful. The European Union therefore encouraged Governments to adopt benchmarks for that purpose.

26. The debate at the current session on the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights was the final stage of the five-year review. The agreed conclusions adopted by the Economic and Social Council during the coordination segment of its 1998 substantive session showed that substantial progress had been made with regard to system-wide coordination and inter-agency cooperation to promote human rights. The European Union welcomed the progress achieved in better integrating human rights in the activities of the United Nations system, especially in the economic, social and development areas, and the increasing recognition of the importance of human rights in conflict prevention and resolution.

27. The World Conference had recommended that the structural capacities of the United Nations human rights system should be strengthened. The establishment of the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights represented one of most visible outcomes of the Conference, and the European Union actively supported the work of the High Commissioner. The emphasis of the Organization's work in the area of human rights had increasingly shifted to the field. Since the Conference had called for a comprehensive programme within the United Nations system to assist States in strengthening their national structures and capacities in the field of human rights, there had been a substantial increase in the number of technical assistance projects undertaken by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and in the involvement of other parts of the

United Nations system. In addition, United Nations human rights field presences had been established in a number of countries, either as part of peacekeeping or peace-building operations or as separate offices. A human rights dimension should be an integral part of any peacekeeping or peace-building initiative, including technical assistance programmes aimed at strengthening national human rights institutions and the rule of law. The European Union and its member States had provided the field presences with strong support in the form of financial and personnel resources.

28. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action emphasized the importance of United Nations human rights mechanisms and called for the strengthening of the special procedures of the Commission on Human Rights and its Subcommission. The European Union welcomed the review of the special procedures initiated by the Bureau of the Commission at the fifty-fourth session and supported the efforts of the mechanisms themselves to improve cooperation and coordination. The special procedures had played an important and useful role over the years in drawing attention to human rights violations, addressing individual cases through the urgent appeal procedure and making recommendations on human rights problems, including suggestions for the provision of technical assistance. The full cooperation of Governments was necessary in that regard. The European Union shared the concern of the High Commissioner for Human Rights about the lack of cooperation on the part of certain Governments, which refused to receive United Nations rapporteurs or working groups. The human rights activities of the United Nations could not be implemented successfully without the necessary resources. Although the member States of the European Union and others contributed, the needs should be fully reflected in regular budget allocations.

29. The World Conference had expressed the international community's concern at over massive violations of human rights and had called for measures to end impunity. In that regard, the European Union was extremely satisfied with the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, which would prosecute and try the most heinous crimes and violations of humanitarian law when national courts were unwilling or unable to render justice. The European Union urged States to sign and ratify the Statute as soon as possible in order to ensure its early entry into force. Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an impressive set of international and regional human rights instruments had been developed. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action called for universal ratification of the core human rights instruments and underlined the obligation of States to take concrete steps to give full effect to them, including through incorporation in domestic law. States should also undertake a comprehensive review of relevant national laws with a view to bringing them into line with international standards and providing an effective framework for redress in cases of human rights violations.

30. National committees had been formed in the member States of the European Union, comprising government representatives, political parties, non-governmental organizations and trade unions, in order to strengthen dialogue between representatives of civil society and State authorities in the area of human rights. The European Union had been built on shared human rights values, particularly through the human rights system established in the Council of Europe. It constantly strove to improve its human rights policies both internally and externally. It maintained a constant dialogue with research institutions and with non-governmental organizations, whose contribution to the implementation of human rights had been stressed in the Vienna Programme of Action. Non-governmental organizations increased awareness of human rights through public information, education and training activities. They helped to monitor the human rights situation in various countries and proposed ways of strengthening respect for human rights. The European Union attached great importance to their role in human rights and supported their work.

31. **Mr. Fernandez Palacios** (Cuba) said that the mid-decade review of the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action constituted an important moment in the follow-up to the World Conference on Human Rights. His delegation would have liked to see that matter debated in the plenary Assembly, rather than in the Third Committee, preceded by ample consultations. The report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to the World Conference on Human Rights (A/53/372) had not lived up to expectations. Its wording was at times incoherent, and it ignored essential elements of the Vienna Programme of Action.

32. The creation of the post of High Commissioner for Human Rights could rightly be considered as one of the most important outcomes of the Vienna Conference. The human rights mechanisms established by the United Nations still needed to be adapted, rationalized and simplified. Efforts exerted to that end had failed because developed countries, which showed so much enthusiasm for action in other priority areas, had not demonstrated the requisite political will. The Third Committee's Working Group on Human Rights had been virtually disbanded before it could fulfil its mandate. Cuba was concerned about attempts to exclude the review and adaptation of United Nations human rights

mechanisms from the intergovernmental process. Despite all the efforts made it had proved impossible to attain universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by 1995, and it would be difficult to achieve that goal for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by the year 2000.

33. International cooperation in the field of human rights had suffered as a result of the selective and arbitrary approach adopted by some countries in order to serve their political agendas and impose their own policy objectives. Confrontation could only be detrimental to cooperation. There, too, the international community had failed in its obligations.

34. Economic, social and cultural rights remained "invisible" as far as the human rights mechanisms were concerned. Relegated to second place, those rights deserved urgent consideration. In that context, recognition of the right to development, as defined in the Declaration on the Right to Development, would represent a valuable contribution.

35. The World Conference on Human Rights had called upon States to refrain from any unilateral measure not in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations that created obstacles to trade relations among States and impeded the full realization of the human rights set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in particular the rights of everyone to a standard of living adequate for their health and well-being, including food and medical care, housing and the necessary social services. That appeal appeared to have fallen on deaf ears. Cuba hoped that the United Nations mechanisms responsible for human rights would take more vigorous measures in that respect.

36. If the International Bill of Human Rights were to continue to develop, a programme must be developed that would promote genuine enjoyment of the rights recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the two International Covenants. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action remained the most comprehensive and progressive document adopted by consensus by the international community in the field of international cooperation for the promotion and protection of human rights. Its complete implementation continued to be the most important challenge facing the United Nations in the field of human rights. Cuba reaffirmed its commitment to playing an active role in that respect.

37. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh) said that the five-year review of implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, which coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was taking place at a time when millions around the world were denied the basic human rights to food, shelter, health care, clean water, education and work. Racial hatred and acts of genocide were commonplace, as were xenophobic attitudes and racial, religious and gender discrimination. In the run-up to the new millennium, a renewed commitment to remove all obstacles to the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms was required.

38. One of the main initiatives taken by Bangladesh in order to follow up the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action had been the preparation, with the participation of Government agencies, non-governmental human rights organizations and civil society, of a law to establish a national human rights commission. The commission would provide a legal framework to which recourse could be had in cases involving human rights violations. His country commended the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for her endeavours with respect to implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. In that context, his delegation wished to raise a number of concerns. It was the primary responsibility of States to ensure implementation of the provisions of the Declaration at national level in cooperation with non-governmental organizations and in an international spirit of partnership. The effectiveness of human rights treaty bodies should be increased, and universal ratification of the core human rights treaties must be promoted.

39. Human rights were universal, indivisible and interdependent, and full enjoyment of those rights must be encouraged by the international community in a spirit of peace, security, justice and development. An environment conducive to respect for human rights and human development could only be created through the eradication of poverty. The negative aspects of globalization had also had an adverse impact on the human rights situation in general. Widespread violation of the basic rights of civil populations during armed conflict remained a source of concern. A two-way approach should be taken to prevention by ensuring that perpetrators did not go unpunished and by building a culture of peace and non-violence through education. Steps must be taken to promote equality of the sexes and women's enjoyments of their basic rights, and particular attention should be paid to the elimination of violence against women. Strengthening the role of non-governmental organizations with respect to the promotion and protection of human rights, together with the necessary political will, would help ensure the full implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

40. **Mr. Satoh** (Japan) said that the international community had made a great deal of progress in the

promotion and protection of human rights since the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. The Convention on the Rights of the Child had been almost universally ratified, the post of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had been established and new mechanisms for the promotion of human rights, in particular of economic, social and cultural rights, had been created within the United Nations. The Government of Japan had been working to implement the recommendations made in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, and its efforts were continuing.

41. While Governments had primary responsibility for the promotion and protection of human rights, the importance of international cooperation could not be overstated. In that respect, Japan was committed to continuing its cooperation through the United Nations system and bilateral and multilateral arrangements.

42. His Government accorded high priority to human development programmes such as the Tokyo Agenda for Action adopted at the Second Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD II). Full implementation of the Agenda's goals would contribute significantly to the promotion and protection of human rights in Africa. By way of example, he said that the Agenda called for reducing the numbers of people living in extreme poverty by at least 50 per cent and ensuring universal primary education to all African children by 2015. It also called on African countries to consider establishing independent human rights institutions, appointing ombudsmen responsible for human rights and promoting civil education. The Agenda also reflected its sponsors' wish to promote gender mainstreaming in a number of fields in order to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005, reduce maternal mortality to half the 1990 rate by 2005 and provide access to reproductive health services for all individuals of appropriate age by the year 2015. Despite its economic difficulties and financial constraints, his Government would continue to play a leading role in development cooperation for Africa, and intended to provide 90 billion yen in grants over the next five years.

43. Japan also accorded great importance to the promotion and protection of human rights in the Asia-Pacific region. On three occasions since 1995, it had hosted, in cooperation with the United Nations University, symposia on human rights in the region, and it was actively participating in the workshops on regional arrangements for the promotion and protection of human rights organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The workshop held in Tehran in March 1998 had been particularly successful, and had led to the elaboration of a regional technical cooperation programme. His Government had also taken measures in 1995 to benefit women, and it welcomed the establishment of the United Nations Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence against Women, which it had proposed. It was clear that the international community must continue and intensify its efforts to promote human rights. To that end, regular budget allocations for those activities should be increased, field operations should receive additional finance, and system-wide cooperation should be encouraged in the promotion and protection of fundamental rights.

44. His Government was pleased to announce that it had recently decided, in response to the appeal by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, to make a voluntary contribution of US$ 180,000 towards the financing of the human rights field operation in Kosovo.

45. **Mr. Kanavin** (Norway), summarizing the measures taken by Norway to implement the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, said that his Government had appointed a Minister of Human Rights who was responsible for ensuring that national policies contributed to the promotion of human rights. A human rights committee had been established at the ministerial level, and his Government was consulting with non-governmental organizations, professional organizations and trade unions, academic institutions and public bodies.

46. With regard to legislation, his Government had recently presented to the Parliament a bill which sought to incorporate the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenants and their protocols into Norwegian law and which stipulated that, if they afforded better protection of the rights in question, they should take precedence over Norwegian law. Parliament was expected to adopt the bill within a few months. His Government had also made significant amendments to the Criminal Procedure Act and had therefore been able to withdraw Norway's only reservation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to withdraw in part its reservation to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

47. With regard to the protection of women, children and vulnerable groups, many goals remained unrealized. However, much had already been done (including the review of measures taken to promote gender equality, the establishment of a national centre to combat ethnic discrimination, the development of a national plan of action for disabled persons), and Norway's labour legislation had recently been amended to make discrimination based on

race, colour, nationality, ethnic origin or sexual preference, in the area of employment, a criminal offence.

48. Various activities had been undertaken in the field of human rights education. New teaching materials had been distributed in primary schools, awareness-raising campaigns had been organized in secondary schools using information on human rights available on the Internet, and the University of Oslo would shortly be offering a new Master's degree course in human rights.

49. With respect to national plans of action, his Government was to present to the Parliament in spring 1999 a plan of action at both the national and international levels. Given that the formulation of national plans of action for human rights was one of the major commitments undertaken by Governments in Vienna, a commitment which had been continued by the Asian States, amongst others, at the Tehran Conference in late 1997, States should exchange views, publicize the plans which they had drawn up or were in the process of drawing up, and discuss their methods of work and principles.

50. At the current stage in the follow-up to the World Conference on Human Rights, Norway would support the proposal concerning the development, for such national plans of action, of principles similar to the Principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights, the so-called Paris Principles.

51. **Mr. Abdelaziz** (Egypt) said that, despite the increased awareness of human rights principles, much remained to be done to give concrete expression to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action emphasized that all human rights were universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated, and that the international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis. Cultural, social and economic rights, including the right to development, must therefore be accorded the same importance as civil and political rights, as the High Commissioner for Human Rights had pointed out. While supporting the principle that the primary responsibility for the promotion and protection of human rights lay with States, his delegation wished to underline in that regard that initiatives aimed at undermining the territorial integrity or political unity of independent and sovereign States must not be encouraged. It was convinced that democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms were interdependent and mutually reinforcing, as stated in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. During the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Egypt's First Lady had emphasized in that connection that there were three prerequisites for the promotion and protection of human rights, namely democracy, justice and development.

52. In accordance with the recommendations of the Vienna Conference, Egypt had acceded to more than 18 international instruments and was endeavouring to bring its national legislation into line with the spirit and letter of those instruments, while taking fully into account its own cultural and religious specificities. It was seeking to fulfil the obligations incumbent upon it in that respect and to address human rights issues while bearing in mind, at all time, three fundamental principles, namely the non-politicization of human rights, the avoidance of selectivity and the importance of taking cultural diversity into account. As part of the updating of the national curricula, Egypt had introduced courses on human rights, women's rights' tolerance, the environment and disarmament into basic and higher education. Also, within the context of the modernization of the legal system, several government committees were working with governmental organizations which played a leading role in promoting and strengthening respect for human rights at the national, regional and international levels. Like most developing countries, Egypt, which aspired to greater levels of development and democracy, had a clear vision of issues relating to human rights, which although they were centred on fundamental individual freedoms, also affected the well-being, stability, prosperity and progress of society as a whole. It was therefore seeking to strengthen human rights by creating an environment conducive to human development by working to eradicate poverty, hunger and illiteracy, in accordance with its responsibilities towards the current generation and those to come.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.